

**LYNCHBURG
DOWNTOWN & RIVERFRONT
MASTER PLAN 2000**

Prepared for

City of Lynchburg
Lynch's Landing, Inc.

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INTRODUCTION

The City of Lynchburg, in conjunction with Lynch's Landing, Inc., engaged Sasaki Associates to further develop and complete the Downtown and Riverfront Master Plan. The Master Plan encompasses the area from the Route 29 Expressway to Fifth Street (Business Route 29), and from Clay Street to the riverfront. The surrounding neighborhoods are central to the success of downtown, and include Daniel's Hill, Garland Hill, College Hill, Federal Hill, and Diamond Hill. Across the riverfront, Amherst County is designing park improvements to the north bank of the James River, which will greatly enhance visibility of the Lynchburg side. For downtown to succeed, the historic core must be viewed within the context of the region, serving the needs of residents, businesses, and visitors by offering unique uses in the realms of culture, entertainment, housing, retail, and professional and government services.

An implementation strategy is integral to the current study and includes several early-action projects that will signal public interest in downtown. At the same time, the plan establishes a long-term direction for the downtown district in order to provide a framework for decision-making as implementation proceeds. The City will have to focus its efforts on a few strategic projects that will make a significant impact, setting the stage for subsequent private investment. From the outset of the study, the Ninth Street corridor and the riverfront have been designated as high-priority public improvement projects, and economic development has been a priority objective.

Several factors preceded the plan and set the stage for a new Downtown and Riverfront Plan for Lynchburg:

- Existing riverfront festivals and events created and managed by Lynch's Landing.



River Festival on the James

- Preliminary riverfront improvement concepts prepared by LDR International, Inc.
- Existing pedestrian and bike access to Percival's Island; added parking and streetscape improvements in the immediate area; and the ongoing design and construction of regional trails and recreational parks on the Amherst County riverfront and Blackwater Creek Trail.
- The opening of Amazement Square in March 2001, a children's museum on the riverfront.
- The success of the existing Community Market.
- An Army Corps of Engineers study of a sewer interceptor to replace the combined sewer overflow along a seven-mile stretch of the James River (CSO Study) led by Wiley & Wilson Engineers.



Aerial of Existing James Riverfront

- The need for direction and policies to address historic preservation goals while providing additional parking in key downtown locations.
- The need for key projects, such as the Riverviews Artists' Lofts and the Academy of Music, to come to fruition.
- The potential for a new Federal Courthouse.
- The need for a James River Welcome Center in the downtown area to complement the possible relocation of the Visitor Center to Kemper Street Station.

- Downtown Lynchburg's unique identity and two-hundred-year history, including the extensive investments made in infrastructure, buildings, civic institutions, businesses and private residences.

While the above conditions were readily apparent, the downtown also faces a number of other issues that are addressed in the Master Plan. The extent of vacant historic buildings in the downtown area is sizable and affects the pedestrian environment and public perception. Over the last several months, a few new restaurants and other businesses have enlivened Main Street, yet there continues to be a lack of critical mass in the commercial office, retail, housing, and entertainment markets. The riverfront has become a popular space for concerts and festivals taking advantage of the undeveloped riverfront.

Over time, the programming of this space needs to evolve to be compatible with open space and development improvements. Finally, the image and the function of the downtown will be greatly improved

with a coherent and attractive signage system that highlights gateways, key destinations, and the interpretation of historic and environmental features.

After initial interviews with stakeholders in Lynchburg, opportunities for the downtown quickly became apparent. Not only does the downtown have a rich history, but also the adjoining neighborhoods, the entire City, and the region offer many complementary historic resources that could attract a tourist base. The proximity to the natural and recreational attractions in the region also suggests a high quality of life that gives Lynchburg a competitive advantage over other locations. Although the City is not



Overall Perspective of the Downtown and Riverfront Plan

located on an Interstate, it has good highway access and an airport. In addition, many colleges are located in and around Lynchburg. With the river flowing adjacent to downtown, this part of the City can become the nexus for regional trail systems and urban waterfront activities.

Revitalization of the downtown and riverfront is not without challenges, however. Downtown is struggling to compete with the City's suburbs, where retail, industry and corporate businesses have relocated. With easy access and extensive available land, residential preferences are weighted toward the outskirts, although a committed group of residents has reclaimed and improved the historic neighborhoods downtown. Filling the extensive vacancies downtown will involve a significant change in perception for people to realize the advantages of the culture,

recreation and history of the downtown environment. A plan for downtown and the riverfront must address the remaining industrial uses, including active rail lines along the riverbank and truck routes that traverse the downtown area. Parking demand in the downtown area must be satisfied to meet tenant requirements, particularly for office space, without destroying the architectural fabric of the downtown. The steep grades along the bluffs create wonderful opportunities for scenic views, but they restrict pedestrian access, making connections between downtown and the riverfront a special challenge. Planning for the riverfront must contend with the 100-year floodplain and the design and construction schedule for the proposed sewer interceptor.

Process

The plan has developed through the input of a broad cross-section of people vested in downtown. This input provided vital background information, offered unique ideas for the future, and ultimately grounded the plan in reality. To this end, the process has involved a combination of focus group meetings and open public forums. Lynch's Landing has been an important partner throughout the process, bringing continuity from previous planning efforts and representing downtown and riverfront interests. Discussions with these groups have been sustained through the planning period by a series of stakeholder and public meetings at each project milestone:

- Initial Project Kick-Off: interviews with stakeholder groups (June 1999)
- Analysis Presentation: stakeholder meetings and a City Forum (September 1999)
- Alternatives Presentation: stakeholder meetings and an Open House (December 1999)
- Draft Master Plan Presentation: City Forum (April 2000)

The focus groups engaged the following constituencies:

- Lynch's Landing Board Members and City staff
- Non-profit organizations and neighborhood associations
- Downtown businesses
- Regional interests, including county and local governments, and regional organizations
- Open space, landscape design and riverfront advocates

- Parking and transportation interests
- City Council

Coordination with other ongoing planning and design efforts has been a critical element of the Downtown and Riverfront Plan process. These efforts include:

- James River Sewer Interceptor (CSO) Study
- Amazement Square Children's Museum
- Amherst County Riverfront Park at the Smiley Block site
- Courthouse expansions and relocations
- Regional Renaissance planning
- J. W. Ould Building reuse and renovation for the Human Services Department
- Percival's Island and Blackwater Creek trail improvements and expansion
- Kemper Street Visitor Center
- Downtown festivals and special events
- Riverviews Artist Lofts
- The Academy of Music

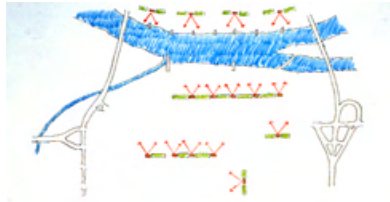
Based on the initial interviews with the focus groups and the site analysis, a series of design principles was developed to shape the overall plan.

Design and Planning Principles

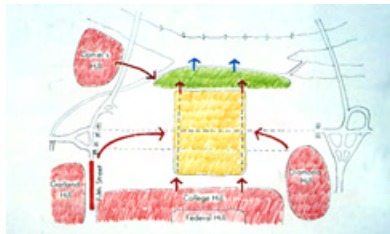
The design principles are the framework for moving forward and building on the great strengths and assets of the downtown.



Create pedestrian circulation loop.

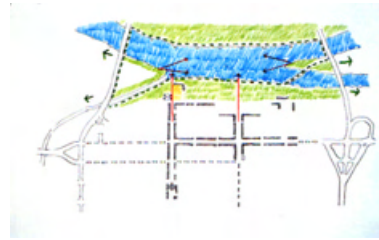


Establish visual connections between the bluffs and to the river.

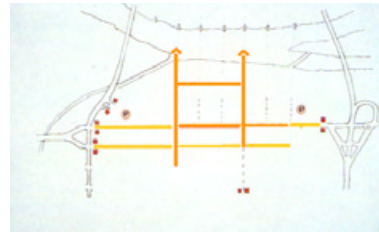


Connect downtown and neighborhoods to the riverfront.

1. *Create a Downtown Walking Loop:* Concentrate efforts on improving and expanding the retail businesses, street-level activities, and streetscape environments along Ninth Street, Main Street, Twelfth Street and Jefferson Street.
2. *Celebrate Stairs:* Establish a system of stairs and bluff walks that emphasizes the stunning topography, views, and historic resources from the top of the hills down to the riverfront.
3. *Connect Neighborhoods with Downtown:* Strengthen pedestrian connections among the historic neighborhoods, downtown and the river. Extend the residential fabric from the historic neighborhoods into the heart of downtown.



Reinvent the river as a place.



Acknowledge gateways; keep parking at the edges of the pedestrian loop.

4. *Reinvent the River as a Place:* Interpret the City's founding at the ferry crossing and the 19th-century industrial development around the Kanawha Canal, and incorporate this history into site improvements, civic institutions, new housing, and programming. Along the riverfront, develop water-related activities, such as boating and fishing, supported by recreational uses in the riverfront park and a linked trail system on both sides of the river.
5. *Acknowledge Gateways:* Define gateways and create a sequence of arrival experiences for visitors leading from the bridges and regional highways to the downtown streets, parking, sidewalks and key destinations.
6. *Intertwine Programmed Activities, Park Design and Economic Development:* Develop a strategy that balances these elements over time, with initial energies focused on programmed activities, such as festivals, and long-term efforts focused on capital investment that will trigger sustainable redevelopment.

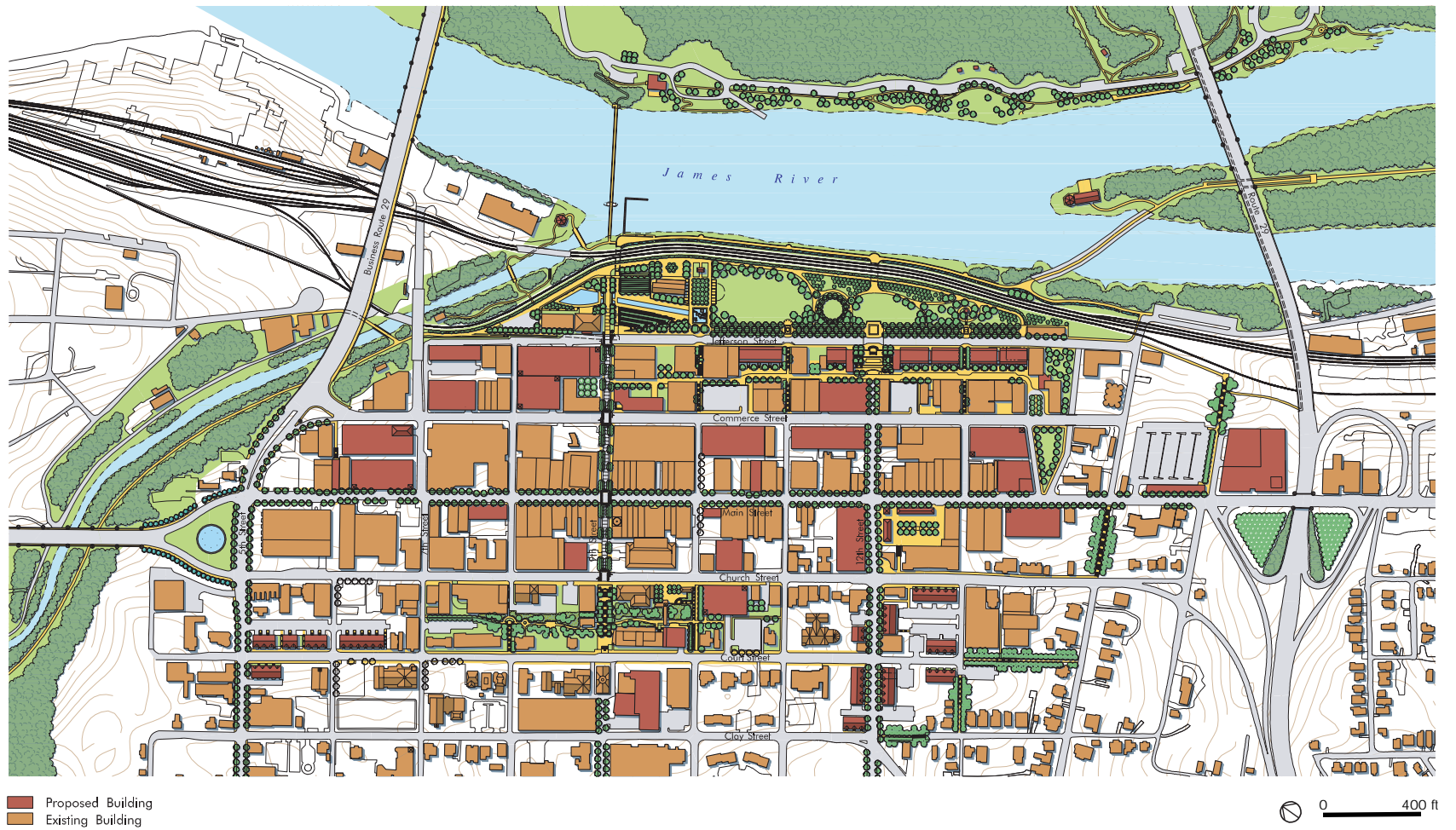


Figure 1. Illustrative Master Plan

Downtown and Riverfront Vision

Downtown Lynchburg will be a vital district enlivened by additional residents, employees, shoppers, tourists, and other visitors from the City, the surrounding region, and beyond. This part of the City will be the cultural hub for the region, offering unique attractions such as the Amazement Square children's museum, the Academy of Music and other performing arts venues, the Community Market, and possibly recreational ice-skating. Complementing these attractions will be a variety of restaurants, a possible movie theater and retail shops along Main Street, with other destinations in key locations along the riverfront. The history of Lynchburg will be woven into all aspects of downtown, embracing the Old Courthouse Museum, the historic hill neighborhoods, notable architecture, interpretive markers and signage along the riverfront, and gateways into downtown. New residences on the bluff overlooking the river and throughout downtown will provide critical mass that complements the historic hill neighborhoods and engenders an 18- to 24-hour city.

Ninth Street

Ninth Street will make a sweeping descent to the river from the renovated Monument Terrace down a tree-lined street to the lively activity around Amazement Square at Ninth Street and Jefferson Street. The children's museum, Riverviews Lofts, and the Department of Human Services in the J. W. Ould Building will lead people down toward the riverfront. From the elevated vantage point at the intersection of Jefferson Street and Ninth Street, the new riverfront park will extend across the entire area of level land between the riverbank and the line of loft buildings along Jefferson Street.

James River Park

The new park will continue to accommodate a host of special events and performances, both large and small. This civic space will be the gathering

ground for the entire City—a place to enjoy music, art, history or nature in the very heart of the urban area. A destination playground will attract families and will complement Amazement Square, as will the Model Boat Basin and the restored Kanawha Canal. Broad open lawns will provide flexible space for large events or for casual play. Many people will enjoy sitting on the Great Steps along the canal to relax in the sun while watching and listening to the play of water in the fountain. While the canal will recall the former waterway in this area, certain features will actually be restored, including the original bridge over the canal and the nearby train tunnel. A gracious promenade along the length of Jefferson Street will be a place to stroll, meet, sit, enjoy lunch and watch other people. Housing and retail uses along the bluff will further enhance these activities and will provide the necessary "eyes on the park" that make open space areas feel more secure at all times of the day and evening. The former N&W Depot will be restored as retail and/or recreational use. The magnificent Overlook Terrace will provide a direct connection up to Twelfth Street and the Community Market area, and also accommodates quiet seating areas beneath trees, ornamental plantings, and a vantage point for viewing the river and activities in the James River Park.

James River and the Riverwalk

For those interested in reaching the river's edge, two underpasses will extend beneath the newly consolidated rail lines: one at the foot of Ninth Street and one aligned with Twelfth Street. Bike rentals and boat rentals on the waterfront will provide mobility for people interested in exploring the James River and the trail systems along the river and Blackwater Creek. A new pedestrian bridge will reconnect Daniel's Hill to downtown and the riverfront. In the long run, pedestrian connections between downtown Lynchburg and Amherst County can be achieved with a pedestrian bridge at the foot of Ninth Street and/or a pedestrian bridge inserted within the piers of the Route 29 Expressway Bridge.

Topography

Lynchburg's topography will be celebrated by a series of stairs throughout the downtown and by two bluff walks that provide overlooks for the whole City. Each stairway will be memorable and distinctive, enticing people to seek out each one and explore the many hills and overlooks in the City. The stairs will make vital connections, as well, between the riverfront and the downtown, and between the downtown and the hill neighborhoods. The bluff walks—one above Jefferson Street and one above Church Street—will offer a continuous walk along the crest of the high ground in each location, with long-range views along the way. The green, landscaped character of the Church Street bluff will complement the more urban character of the Jefferson Street bluff with its narrow pedestrian-scaled street framed by brick loft buildings.

Gateways

For first-time visitors, the gateways into downtown will be clearly marked with beacons, lights, landscape plantings, and a graphic signage system. This signage system will involve a hierarchy of signs to lead a visitor from the regional routes to the local streets, from the streets to parking and on foot to key destinations. At either end of downtown, new landscape plantings will highlight the gateways on the west (Rivermont Avenue and Fifth Street with Church Street and Main Street), on the east (Main Street with the Route 29 Expressway), and on the north (along Twelfth Street).

Catalyst Projects

Major new projects will provide catalysts for other new development. The opening of Amazement Square, the Academy, Riverviews and the renovation of the J. W. Ould Building, future home of the Department of Human Services, will create an active zone along the Ninth Street Corridor between Commerce and Jefferson Streets. The new Federal



Gateways define a sense of place.

Courthouse will be the first infill building to be constructed downtown in several years, providing an impetus for others to follow. Its site selection and design will be critical for success. A recreational ice-skating rink and movie house will further enhance the active corner of Main Street and Twelfth Street next to the Community Market. A James River Welcome Center and the new Bluffwalk Hotel will support visitor activities along the riverfront and at the east gateway into downtown. The newly restored Academy of Music will anchor the west end of Main Street across from the Holiday Inn. Membership in the Main Street Program will assist in the renovation and restoration of the original façades and will promote new retail businesses along Main Street, Church Street and Ninth Street.



Historic architecture creates a unique character downtown.

Housing

In the long term, new market-rate housing with home-ownership opportunities will provide additional life to the downtown, add a sense of downtown ownership, and improve the transition from the hill neighborhoods to downtown. In addition to Riverviews, a new residential area along Twelfth Street below Diamond Hill will improve neighborhood connections and enhance the gateway between the rest of the City and downtown. Along the western end of Court Street, infill housing will strengthen the connection to Fifth Street and Garland Hill beyond. In addition to Riverviews Artists Lofts, new and renovated loft buildings along the Jefferson Street bluff will provide residents with views of the river and the park, as well as close proximity to downtown features. Housing on the upper floors of retail buildings will also generate a

more lively environment and enhance the use and activities on downtown streets.

Building Reuse and New Parking Structures

A major objective will be to fill the one million square feet of vacant space downtown, converting the historic structures with additional residential lofts, offices, and ground-floor retail and restaurants. To support these renovations and new infill development, new parking will need to be added to the downtown supply. New parking decks can be built into the hillside, taking advantage of the multi-level access points afforded by the sloping streets. A series of smaller parking structures at strategic locations will allow for incremental development.

Circulation and Truck Routes

Commerce Street will continue to serve as a major service corridor for parking access and as a primary truck route. A key objective should be to minimize truck traffic on Jefferson Street, Ninth Street, Main Street and Church Street, all heavily used now by trucks. Removing trucks from the lower basin will minimize conflicts on Ninth Street near the children's museum at Amazement Square. In the short term, a traffic signal is recommended for the intersection of Main Street and Washington Street to improve truck-turning movements and enhance the direct connection between the Concord Turnpike and the Route 29 Expressway. With enforcement, trucks could be directed to follow a marked route along Commerce Street using a short segment of Main Street to access Washington Street. In the long term, the extension of Commerce Street back to Washington Street will provide the most direct truck route through downtown, connecting with the Concord Turnpike, Route 29 Expressway and Route 29 Business.

Economic Issues

In order for downtown and riverfront redevelopment in Lynchburg to be successful, public investment policies are required that reinforce downtown Lynchburg's role as a viable address in the regional marketplace. A committed, experienced private sector is also essential, including developers, lenders, and business leaders. Downtown redevelopment efforts should also recognize that architectural character, cultural anchors, and unique parks are distinguishing factors that will give downtown Lynchburg a competitive advantage over nearby suburbs and other cities and towns in the region. Moreover, public policy initiatives focusing on the redevelopment of downtown should be viewed as ongoing, multi-year commitments by the City and supported by aggressive public management and marketing over a ten- to twenty-year period. All of these are critical factors for success.

At present, downtown Lynchburg is at a competitive disadvantage compared to suburban locations because of low rents relative to development costs, and the physical and functional obsolescence of its building stock. The strongest redevelopment opportunities are also the most problematic: large buildings with high capital requirements. While existing public investment has helped stem the tide and has raised downtown's profile in the region, real change downtown will require that the public sector assume a degree of financial risk in specific projects and to maintain these commitments over time to invest in downtown's future. In short, the economic future of downtown Lynchburg is in "real places."

In order to move forward, housing is a critical element, and is one of the most important strategies for downtown over the near term. Retail, on the other hand, is not the lead element, but will continue to play a key role in the early stages of the development process. Other basic economic development principles are as follows:

- Protect and reinforce existing downtown constituencies.
- Concentrate efforts in specific projects that anchor the downtown and create destinations.
- Concentrate activities to achieve more drawing power within market area.
- Create logical districts with clear identities.
- Use public resources (including real estate) strategically.
- Use cultural anchors to enhance prospects for private investment.

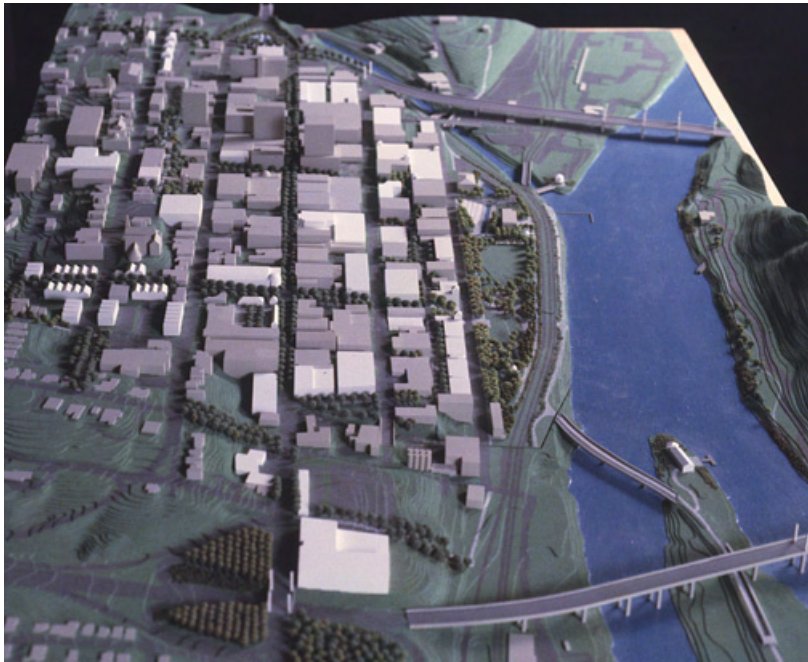
General economic testing has been conducted for a series of catalyst projects to establish overall feasibility and to outline the expected levels of public participation required for each project. These projects include a parking garage on Jefferson and Eighth Street, the Academy of Music, an ice-skating rink/family recreation center, a multi-screen cinema, and several hundred units of housing in the form of loft conversions and new construction.

Implementation

Implementation addresses the timing of strategic and long-range projects, the organization of entities to lead the development effort, and the role of the public, the non-profit, and the private sectors.

Public/Private Partnership

In order to take advantage of downtown's assets and to reap the potential economic benefits there, the public sector must demonstrate a willingness to lead with public investment. A carefully considered strategy for public investment is required to leverage private investment and thus maximize the benefits. This investment in public infrastructure and the participation



Model of the Downtown and Riverfront Plan

in catalyst projects will signal the necessary confidence in the market potential. The commitment of consistent public-sector incentives, policies and investment is required to realize the recommendations in the Downtown and Riverfront Plan. In the private sector, additional development capacity should be pursued from other parts of the region to provide experience and financing credibility for urban residential and commercial projects.

Downtown Entity

Leadership will be a critical ingredient to the future of downtown. This objective can be met by creating an entity that can focus on downtown development, with a director in a leadership position who brings a broad set of professional skills to the job. This position should be supported by a Downtown Council and ultimately a more formal board that represents the municipal government and its key departments, Lynch's Landing and other non-profits, and the local business community.

Public Sector Initiatives

Some of the initial tasks that the City must undertake include the following:

- Begin sewer separation in the lower portion of the Ninth Street Corridor, working with the Army Corps of Engineers CSO Study.
- Complete the design and begin construction of the lower Ninth Street streetscape near Amusement Square.
- Secure funding and complete the design for the remainder of the Ninth Street improvements, including sewer separation and streetscape.
- Complete the design and begin renovation of the Human Services facilities at the J. W. Ould Building and construction of the adjacent parking garage.

- Design Monument Terrace improvements and use public investment to leverage private funds to support renovation.
- Participate in financial packages for Riverviews Lofts and the Academy of Music (including Sixth Street utility relocation).
- Work with the GSA to site a new Federal Courthouse downtown.
- Negotiate with railroads, then design and fund rail line relocation.
- Begin truck route improvements with a signalized intersection at Main Street and Washington Street, with long-term planning for an extension of Commerce Street.
- Secure funding and begin the construction of the pedestrian bridge at Blackwater Creek.
- Acquire key properties, especially along bluff walks.
- Prepare signage scheme/design for entire downtown and begin installation at key locations (gateways, key tourism destinations, and public parking garages).

- Create a local historic district and implement design review based on existing design guidelines.
- Redevelop or sell city-owned buildings on Main Street adjoining the Community Market.

With City leadership and the proper downtown development entity in place, the downtown can become a unique and distinguished place in the heart of the region. Working through a dedicated downtown entity, the City must invest in streets and open spaces, participate in initial catalyst projects to close the financial gap, direct the location of key projects, and continuously seek out appropriate tenants, businesses, and development partners. In return, the City will reap the return on its investment in the form of an increased tax base, additional jobs, strong office and retail market, and a committed constituency of downtown residents and civic pride.



The Twelfth Street corridor will lead directly to the riverfront from the Community Market.

